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THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE IN ACCIDENT PREVENTION

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states: "13. The Minister may promote and
encourage accident prevention activities and
safety programs among persons employed
in the public service of Canada."

INTRODUCTION

An accident is an unexpected event being caused by one of two things, an *unsafe act* of a person or an *unsafe physical condition*, or, perhaps, a combination of both. Accident prevention is the foreseeing of the cause and taking definite steps to eliminate it. Prevent the accident and there will be no injury.

THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE IN ACCIDENT PREVENTION

Accident prevention needs the persistent day to day effort that is a requirement of any achievement of merit. This is not easy.

A supervisor's sincerity towards accident prevention must be proved by his own attitude and he must have, in addition, an elementary knowledge of the basic fundamentals of accident prevention before he can reasonably control the accident rate of those under his authority.

Not so long ago, a supervisor's job was looked upon as limited to production. Today, this has changed, he must not only get out the work but he must do so economically and at the same time maintain good relationship with his workers.

A supervisor must appreciate the need for accident prevention and maintain his active interest even when individuals show a lack of concern in so far as their own safety is concerned.

The supervisor is expected to recognize any improper work method, unusual occurrence or unsafe condition that might interfere with production.

He must also recognize the development of a poor attitude or upset conditions that might affect the work of others.

He must bear in mind that many of the factors that cause accidents are those that are recognized as being the cause of industrial waste. The following are a few examples:

- The improper and rough handling of both raw materials and finished product.
- The improper use and maintenance of tools.
- The faulty way of operating machinery.
- The neglect in the care and maintenance of machines.
- The fact that employees took short-cuts from established standard work methods.
- The lack of knowledge on the part of workers.
- The indifference of employees toward workmanship.

If the supervisor hopes to maintain a high point in his operation efficiency, he must accept accident prevention as an essential part of his daily work. He must also, make use of the fact that the majority of accidents are the result of faulty performance by individuals and that such faulty performance could reduce production.

SELL YOUR POINT

The first fundamental of accident prevention is the providing of a safe working environment but, even when this is accomplished, it is still necessary to convince people the need for working safely and the need to use proper work methods.

It is often said that a successful accident prevention program is nothing more than a successful sales campaign.

This is true and the supervisor that develops his sales ability should see a substantial improvement in his record both for safety and for operating efficiency.

So, the second step for the supervisor is to take a few tips in salesmanship that good salesmen have found to be successful.

Salesmanship and good supervision are very similar. Controlling employee performance is accomplished not by direct order, commands, or threats but by persuasion, example and leadership.

KNOW YOUR PRODUCT

A good salesman must know his product, and be prepared to talk about it in detail. He must know the values involved and be ready to answer convincingly the queries and doubts of his prospects.

In accident prevention, the supervisor must have a working knowledge of the basic principles that have proved acceptable for practical application to all kinds of work.

The supervisor must always have these facts in mind:

1. Accidents just do not happen; they are the result of a sequence of related factors.
2. Every accident that has occurred, and every one that will occur in the future is caused directly by an unsafe act, an unsafe condition or a combination of both.
3. A person does not invariably become involved in an accident and an injury every time he does something wrong, nor does he get hurt every time he is exposed to a mechanical or physical hazard. But, if he continues to short-cut safety, he will, eventually.
4. The margin of safety when an accident occurs, is not controllable and the severity of an injury is uncertain.
5. Why a person acts in an unsafe manner or why an unsafe condition is allowed to exist, provides a good guide to the selection of effective corrective measures.

6. The methods of most value in accident prevention are similar to the methods required for the control of the quality, cost and quantity of production.

KNOW THE CAUSES OF ACCIDENTS

Knowing his product also means that a supervisor must have a knowledge of the probable causes of accidents. To know the causes of accidents that have occurred within a department should not be difficult for the supervisor. He should be prepared to recognize these causes, especially those that in his opinion are most likely to result in serious injury or material losses if permitted to continue.

He should thoroughly investigate and analyze the occurrence of an accident.

Do the factors involved represent—

- An unsafe practice or job method ?
- An unsafe condition ?
- Or a combination of both ?

An appreciation of these facts will help the supervisor in taking proper corrective steps in so far as new instructions, and possible revision of existing rules are concerned.

STUDY THE JOB

The supervisor should study each job and from his knowledge and experience, anticipate the actions that workers are most likely to try that will cause accidents. For example, are there any likely performances that workers might be expected to try that would result in falls, being struck by moving objects, striking against objects, overexertion, being caught in machinery or exposure to harmful substances? In addition to possible injury, would the occurrence cause shut-down time of machines, damage to material, interference with normal operations, loss of time of trained personnel or increased cost to make up for delays?

Anticipation of potential accident makers is a big step forward for the supervisor in his control of accidents.

LEADERSHIP

The third important step for the successful supervisor is to develop leadership. He must learn how to influence workers, and to persuade them to adhere to standard work practices. When a violation of such practices is observed, the supervisor can do much to help himself correct this situation if he can discover the answers as to why the worker failed to follow instructions.

Frequently, the reason given for an unsafe performance is the fact that the individual was tired and just did not think. This fatigue could be the result of inadequate lighting, glare, lack of contrast, awkward movements, monotony of work or an uncomfortable position.

If a “don’t care” attitude is expressed by an individual, it may be the result of discomfort due to cold, heat or drafts. It might also be a feeling that the supervisor has failed to exhibit any interest in the individual.

Employees are sometimes mentally disturbed because of noise, distraction by others or other personal problems and consequently do things that are wrong unknowingly.

Frequently, the supervisor will find that the reason for an unsafe performance is tied in with some inefficient mechanical conditions. For example, an accident probably would not have occurred if—

- controls were located in the open so as to eliminate awkward or hazardous positions of the worker.
- adequate clearance was allowed for operating work trucks.
- start and stop buttons on machines were located within easy reach.
- material was stored in a manner that made it easy to locate and get at when needed.

Approaching the problem in this manner, the supervisor is establishing a sense of fairness in the minds of his workers. He is practicing a procedure that has been called human engineering which is the process of creating a work situation in which the efficiency of the man and the machine is at a maximum.

TALK TO ASSOCIATES

If the supervisor will take the opportunity to talk to individuals, he will find many advantages to himself in his effort to direct people.

He gets to know their attitudes.

It helps him to improve his ability to give instructions.

He has the opportunity to show his appreciation of the opinion of the individual.

He gains experience in getting people to work co-operatively.

He builds up his enthusiasm by his continued interest which is so important if he hopes to convince others.

He has the opportunity better to analyze and evaluate grievances and offer solutions to problems before they become serious.

He has the opportunity of exercising disciplinary action by tactfully calling an employee's attention

to the right way of doing his job. Talking to individuals has proved to be the most effective way of giving instructions, and the progressive supervisor will work out a plan that will enable him to practice this approach. He should remember, however, that there are different types of people which means that he has to modify his manner to meet the characteristics of the individual. The four most general types of people are as follows:

1. *The ambitious individual*, who asks questions because he is interested and wants to have a better understanding of why things have to be done in a certain way.
2. *The aggressive individual*, but argumentative to the point of being antagonistic. He argues not for the purpose of clarifying a situation but rather in an attempt to frustrate the supervisor.
3. *The insecure type*. He lacks initiative or confidence in himself. He wants everything spelled out for him. He must be given instructions in detail and the supervisor cannot assume that this type of person will exercise proper care in an emergency.
4. *The individualist* who is sincere, dependable and conscientious. He needs only general instructions.

He does not require detailed instructions and takes pride in his ability to work things out by himself.

A PRACTICAL WAY TO SHOW INTEREST

The following step-by-step procedure may be helpful to the supervisor in establishing an accident prevention program by personal contacts with his subordinates:

1. Know the unsafe working practices that have caused past accidents.
2. Select those causes that in your opinion are most likely to be repeated and which represent conditions that would result in serious injury, damage, delay, waste or interference, if permitted to continue unchecked.
3. Add to this list those unsafe practices or habits that your experience tells you are likely to develop whether or not accidents have actually occurred to the present group.
4. Make these probable causes of accidents known to your employees. Explain why you selected them. Show them how the right way is a better way and that it is just as easy to develop the right habit as the unsafe habit.

5. Give them the opportunity to say what obstacles they think might stand in the way of doing the job the way you want it done. If you let the individual talk, you may find the underlying cause of improper performances.
6. Do not be too anxious to prove him wrong. Confidence in you will increase if the individual realizes that you are not arbitrary and are willing to listen to possible errors in your opinions. Establish the fact that you want them to work smarter not harder.
7. Explain why you are talking about wrong methods even though an accident has not occurred.
8. Make it clear that it is your intention to follow up and make checks for any failures to adhere to the established right methods.
9. Establish a definite routine to check for violations of the right working methods.
10. When violations are observed, do not ignore them. Talk with the individual involved. It is at this point that the supervisor must exercise his qualification as such. There is no one way that will guarantee that a person found doing something unsafe can be permanently cured. There are, however, many different approaches to a problem and the supervisor has access to all of them.

11. The supervisor must not forget that individuals respond to certain motivating forces. Ambition, Desire for Recognition, Security, Participation, Pride of Accomplishment.
12. Give the individual an opportunity of explaining why he continued to do something that had been pointed out as being wrong or unsafe. In general, you do not ask for this explanation in a demanding manner. You are concerned, you are interested, you are looking for information. You want to be fair. You assume that he wants to co-operate and that he too is concerned about his own safety.
13. Do not be vague in your arguments. Show him how a continuance of wrong methods will affect production efficiency, how it will affect him personally and how it might adversely affect others.
14. Take the opportunity to "sandwich" in some complimentary remarks about the performance of the individual. You cannot expect to convince him of anything while he is angry. Do not let him develop an attitude. "What's the use—nobody cares about how many things you do right."
15. Developing a new habit may require considerable self discipline on the part of the individual. Demonstrate your enthusiasm and the fact that you believe in the value of what you are doing.

Your persistence by continually checking performance will force a person to develop a new work pattern.

16. The supervisor should not limit his talks to observed violations of safe working practices. He should arrange to talk to at least two persons a day about their safety. Be sincere and show the employees that you are expressing your own thoughts and not merely carrying out instructions.
17. Give your people the opportunity to discuss freely their feelings about the value of safe procedures. Listen carefully to any suggestions offered by your people; use them if possible; if they cannot be used, be sure to explain the reason why not.
18. Emphasize instances of administration's interest in the individual's welfare.
19. Point out what has been done to make it easy for the individual to avoid being injured.
20. Try to find out what there might be about a job that would interfere with job satisfaction.
21. Make sure that your instructions are understood.
22. Point out what the individual stands to lose in event of serious injury and explain the effect of non-compliance with instructions on production regardless of the extent of injury. Anticipate that employees may not be too interested in the adverse effect upon production and be prepared

to point out to them what they personally stand to lose if they should be injured. For example—

- The fact that compensation never equals full earnings.
- The fact that there are other expenses incurred which are not covered by compensation.
- The possible loss of opportunity for advancement.
- The inability to provide planned benefits for advancement.
- The inability due to physical deficiency, to enjoy personal hobbies.

All in addition to—

- The physical pain.
- The shock and emotional upset of the family.
- The interference with the plans of others.

Briefly summarizing what has been said, a supervisor can be successful in his efforts to prevent accidents if he will—

Satisfy himself that the prevention of accidents is an activity that is essential for his advancement in the art of supervision.

Have self confidence in his ability to use his knowledge of accident prevention fundamentals in a practical manner.

Keep in mind that people are different in regard to their reactions to one brand of supervision.

Learn to detect characteristics that indicate a man's attitude and adjust approach accordingly.

Build confidence in the mind of the worker by a constant display of interest and enthusiasm.

Approach the problem of preventing accidents in a spirit of looking for reasons why he can do things rather than reasons why he cannot.

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